

S. Valley students to visit S. Africa

5 Kingsburg High teens' ozone experiment leads to invitation.

By Eddie Jimenez / The Fresno Bee

Sunday, Nov. 5, 2007

Five Kingsburg High School students set out to see how ozone affects teenagers.

Their project was so successful that they will travel to South Africa next summer to share their findings at an environmental conference.

The Kingsburg team is one of five in the U.S. selected for the GLOBE Learning Expedition in Cape Town, where the students will present their research in June.

GLOBE (Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment) is an international program that is the brainchild of former Vice President Al Gore, who recently was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his advocacy on global warming.

Judges were impressed that the Kingsburg project dealt with a topic relevant to the community and that it addressed related health issues.

The students began researching ozone levels and the respiratory health of students on their campus in the spring.

Under the guidance of science teacher Peggy Foletta, the students -- seniors Kan Sohal, Melani Por and Kiran Banger and juniors Chelsey Carlson and Sammi Burtner -- placed paper strips used for measuring ozone at 13 locations around the campus. They also surveyed about 300 fellow students to see whether the asthma rate was higher for those playing sports and to compare asthma rates for city versus rural residents.

Ozone is a summertime pollutant and the main ingredient in smog. It is corrosive and can damage lungs and cause asthma.

"We've learned a lot about ozone that we won't forget," said Kan, 17. "I knew asthma was a problem. I didn't know it was so big."

Their survey found that about one in five Kingsburg High students has asthma, similar to the Valleywide rate.

"You don't think about air hindering your health, but it really does," said Melani, 17.

An eye-opener for Chelsey, 16, was becoming more aware that Valley air is among the worst in the country.

"Whenever I think about bad air, I think about L.A.," she said. "I really didn't think ours was that serious."

The students set up ozone strips at various locations -- near parking lots, in the middle of campus, in offices, in a girls' restroom and in classrooms, some containing computers and copy machines. They recorded ozone levels for one-hour periods beginning at 8 a.m., 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. for five days in May, three days in June, two days in July and two days in August.

Their hypothesis was that ozone levels would be highest at 2 p.m. But they found that levels peaked at 11 a.m. and were slightly higher near parking lots than in other campus locations. The

latter was not a surprise, though the difference between parking locations and other sites was not as great as they expected.

The study did not find a significant difference in asthma rates between athletes and nonathletes. The asthma rate was higher for students living in town than for those in rural areas.

In early June, the Kingsburg High team submitted its report, which scientists reviewed and returned to the students with comments and recommendations.

The students reworked and finalized their 55-page study, one of about 50 entries in the competition.

"It made me a lot more interested in what scientists do," Chelsey said of the experience. "They really are finding stuff out and making a difference."

Foletta has led two other winning teams from Kingsburg High in the international competition -- a project in 1998 on a contest of students matching ecosystems and another project in 2003 on air quality in the San Joaquin Valley.

She believes she and her school have been successful in the competition because the science department, of which she is the chairwoman, has incorporated many of the program's concepts into their classes.

About 400 students and 200 scientists and educators are expected to attend next summer's conference, said Jan Heiderer, the program's communications director.

Conference organizers will pay to send the students and Foletta to South Africa, though Sammi Burtner won't be able to make the trip.

While they are in South Africa, Melani hopes to see great white sharks breaching in the ocean; Chelsey wants to go on a safari; and Kan is looking forward to meeting people from different cultures who are interested in environmental issues.

And, Kan said, "I want to do some shopping."

Wood burning prohibited Monday

Staff reports

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Sunday, Nov. 4, 2007

Wood burning is prohibited Monday in Tulare County because of poor air quality, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District reported today.

Air quality was rated "unhealthy" today and is projected to be unhealthy Monday, the district stated in its Air Quality Index forecast.

"Unhealthy" means that air contains a level of pollutants unsafe for outdoor activities, between 151 and 200 in the AQI. Today's AQI ranged from 152 to 153, and Monday's is supposed to rise to the 166-167 range, district officials said.

There is a worse level than "unhealthy," which is 201-300 on the AQI, called "very unhealthy air quality."

For information on Central Valley air quality, how it is measured and how it affects Valley populations, call 230-5800.

No fireplace use Sunday, Monday

The Bakersfield Californian, Monday, Nov. 5, 2007

Don't light up your fireplace or wood stove Sunday or Monday if you live in the valley portion of Kern County.

That's on the orders of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which each day determines the wood-burning status for valley counties.

District officials ordered a mandatory ban because air quality is expected to be unhealthy through at least midnight on Monday. Violators can face fines, which start at \$50 for first-time offenders.

Homes above 3,000 feet or with no other source of heat are exempt.

Check Before You Burn season runs Nov. 1 to Feb. 29. The wood-burning status is available by 4 p.m. each day, in English and Spanish, at 1-800-SMOG-INFO or at www.valleyair.org.

Group hopes to breathe in fresh ideas on cleaning air

California Air Resource Board turns to public for concerns and inspiration

By Dhyana Levy

Merced Sun-Star, Monday, Nov. 5, 2007

A meeting in Merced on Wednesday is set to discuss the future of a resource everyone needs -- air.

Can we have clean air in the San Joaquin Valley before 2024? What more can the California Air Resources Board do to speed up this goal?

These questions on Wednesday won't be directed toward the usual vocal citizens -- environmental experts and outreach groups. This meeting is meant for everyday folks with questions, concerns and, hopefully, ideas, said Patricia Rey, spokeswoman for the Air Resources Board. "It's a listening session," she explained. "We will go over certain ideas the board has, but we mostly want to know what the community thinks."

Why? "Because we are all breathers," said Melissa Kelly-Ortega, program associate for the Merced/Mariposa County Asthma Coalition.

The meeting will be from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. on Wednesday in the multipurpose room of Tenaya Middle School, 760 W. Eighth St. in Merced. A Spanish-language translator will be there.

A topic of discussion will be the federal eight-hour ozone standard in the San Joaquin Valley. A plan to meet the standard is meant give the Valley clean air by 2024. This means reducing emissions that fill areas with unhealthy levels of ozone, carbon monoxide and inhalable particulate matter. The health of the air each day is measured by the air quality index, and the goal is to have each day in the Valley not exceed the standard set for healthy air.

However, some groups -- including the Asthma Coalition -- believe that the standard could be more stringent and would help the Valley reach better air quality before 2024. "Way back before April, we knew the plan was flawed," Kelly-Ortega said.

The Air Resources Board discussed the plan in June and decided to create a task force to explore options on improving air quality more quickly. The task force's job was to get together with community members and people from all industries to gather information and suggestions, said Kelly-Ortega, whose organization is a task force member.

"Basically, leave no stones unturned," she said. "We found some stones were left unturned. Community involvement has been key -- push the Air Resources Board to do more."

This 11-member board, made up of gubernatorial appointees, is part of the California Environmental Protection Agency. It includes science and medical experts and oversees air pollution control efforts all over the state. "People want to see more done and we want to find out what they want done," Rey said.

There are already new regulations going into place to reduce emissions from heavy-duty trucks and other vehicles. This also will be discussed at Wednesday's meeting. "We'd really like to see a full room," she said.

The Merced meeting is the last of three meetings the task force has organized in the northern, middle and southern parts of the Valley. The first two took place in Parlier and Arvin.

Information collected from attendees will be presented to the full Air Resources Board for consideration. So in other words, Rey said, citizen voices will be heard and taken seriously.

News and Notes

Public is welcome at air quality forum

Modesto Bee, Saturday, Nov. 3, 2007

The California Air Resources Board will have a community meeting in Merced on current and future air quality concerns in the San Joaquin Valley, and to hear ideas on what more the agency can do. The meeting is set for 6 to 8 p.m. Wednesday at Tenaya Middle School, 760 W. Eighth St.

Fires Add to Urban Asthma

By Earl Ofari Hutchinson, New America Media
La Prensa San Diego, Friday, Nov. 2, 2007

Editor's Note: For thousands of children and elderly the Southern California wildfires posed yet another dire health threat to a community that has long suffered higher asthma rates from poor air quality and pollution.

Singer Marie Osmond drew sympathy when she fainted twice during a recent segment of ABC TV's Dancing with the Stars. Osmond blamed the wildfires raging throughout Southern California as the culprit that caused her to momentarily lose consciousness on the show. A chagrined Osmond explained that the air quality is poor, but she quickly recovered.

Osmond's fainting spell on the popular dance show was the stuff of celebrity gossip. But for thousands of children and older adults – mostly black and Latino – in South and Central Los Angeles, the wildfires posed yet another dire health threat to a community that has long suffered higher asthma rates from poor air quality and pollution.

The wildfires have severely increased the risk of hospitalization and even death for those who already suffer from chronic respiratory conditions. Scientists have long pointed to a direct connection between bad air quality and the increase in chronic respiratory ailments in poor inner-city neighborhoods. The wildfires tossed into the air a lethal ozone stew of carbon dioxide, water vapor, carbon monoxide, particulate matter and other chemicals.

The grim statistics on the toll that asthma and other respiratory ailments are taking on the poor and minorities are appalling.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, blacks are six times more likely than whites to die from asthma, and are nearly four times more likely than whites to be hospitalized for treatment. Latinos and American Indians also have significantly higher rates of asthma than their white counterparts.

That's just the tip of the iceberg for the poor. Poor air quality in inner cities also has increased coughing spasms, bronchitis and tuberculosis. Even without the dire air quality threat posed by the wildfires to residents in South Los Angeles, children in these neighborhoods are at great risk.

An estimated one in four children in the United States is exposed to ozone levels that exceed the federal limits, and the majority of these children reside in poor urban neighborhoods.

President Bush sent a phalanx of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FE-MA) and Homeland Security officials, federal relief workers and firefighting equipment to Southern California. He authorized millions for spending on relief, recovery and rebuilding efforts. California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger declared that the state would commit full resources to aid the fire victims.

But Bush and Schwarzenegger said little about the health damages of the fires to the children and elderly in South and Central Los Angeles – let alone what federal and state resources they would commit to footing medical costs for the treatment and prevention of any increase in respiratory ailments in those areas.

The instant the fires began to rage out of control, Los Angeles County officials issued necessary health alerts that warned residents to stay indoors and avoid strenuous exercise. They did not, however, indicate what steps they'd take to provide additional treatment facilities, medical personnel and medicines to deal with the increase in fire-related asthma attacks.

Many residents in South and Central Los Angeles didn't wait for federal and state officials to act – they took matters into their own hands. They donned surgical masks for protection against the air, but this didn't do much good. The air contaminant particles are so small that they pass through these filters. With each breath, the tiny chemical particles in the smoke burrow deep into the lungs, causing serious irritation and breathing problems.

But at least residents did recognize the severe risk, and were willing to take some action to try and protect their health. Bush and federal officials will pump millions into the rebuilding of homes and restoring personal property in Southern California. The big question is, will some of those dollars go toward meeting the needs of those in South Los Angeles who are hardest hit by fire-related respiratory illnesses? That's not the stuff of glitzy photo-ops or sweeping declarations by politicians about beating back a crisis, but it is a matter of life and death for the poor.

New America Media Associate Editor Earl Ofari Hutchinson is an author and political analyst. His new book is The Latino Challenge to Black America: Towards a Conversation between African-Americans and Hispanics (Middle Passage Press).

Health Tip: When Air Quality is Bad

Washington Post, Monday, Nov. 5, 2007

(HealthDay News) - Poor air quality can be especially troublesome for asthmatics, making it difficult for them to breathe.

Here are suggestions for asthmatics during bouts with poor air quality, courtesy of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency:

Gauge your sensitivity to air quality by being aware of your symptoms, and how often you have attacks. Reduce any physical activity outdoors. Try exercising early in the morning, when air quality tends to be best. If outdoors, go inside as soon as you start to feel symptoms. Keep your inhaler and other asthma medications on hand at all times.

State air regulators want go-ahead on auto exhaust reduction rules

Matthew Yi, Chronicle Sacramento Bureau
S.F. Chronicle, Monday, Nov. 5, 2007

Sacramento -- California regulators, under pressure to arm the state's ambitious battle against global warming, are eager to tackle one of the biggest sources of carbon emissions: exhaust from millions of cars on the state's roadways.

About one-quarter of the state's greenhouse gas emissions come from passenger vehicles, light trucks and SUVs. Supporters of the state's plan say new exhaust standards for automakers are key to carrying out the state's landmark legislation enacted last year to cut total emissions 25 percent by 2020.

The regulations would begin with 2009 model vehicles arriving in car dealerships next year, and officials at the California Air Resources Board, which wrote the rules, say there are several technologies already available that would help meet the state's goals.

But the federal government must first grant California a special waiver, which is required for states to enforce rules that are more stringent than federal guidelines. This week, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is expected to file a lawsuit to force the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to grant that waiver.

The outcome has ramifications nationwide: About a dozen other states have enacted or are considering regulations patterned after California's rules.

California's regulations seek to require that emissions for a company's entire fleet of vehicles be reduced a total of 30 percent by 2016. As long as automakers add more low-emissions vehicles to their product lineup, they can continue to make gas-guzzling SUVs.

Carmakers in danger of failing to comply with the rules would be allowed to buy carbon credits from another auto manufacturer whose emissions average is below the legal limit.

"This would provide the biggest single chunk of the emission reductions that California needs to achieve by 2020," said Sierra Club lobbyist Bill Magavern. "And the impact would grow in later years because of the turnover of the fleet."

However, the automobile industry has criticized the state's emissions rules as too stringent and claims they would drive up the cost of manufacturing vehicles. The industry argues that the better course would be to ask the federal government to come up with a nationwide standard.

"We believe this is a piecemeal approach that forces us to manufacture different vehicles for different sets of regulation," said Wade Newton, a spokesman for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers.

But California officials say some low-emission technologies already exist.

One of them can shut down some cylinders in an engine when the vehicle is cruising at high speeds to increase fuel efficiency, a feature that Honda offers in its Odyssey minivans.

Another is to build smaller engines that are more fuel-efficient but make up the reduced power with turbochargers. Audi and Volkswagen include such options in their lineup of automobiles, and the turbocharged engines typically have better gas mileage than the same models with regular engines.

Yet another innovation is continuously variable valve timing and lift technology, which makes cars more fuel-efficient by reducing the loss of energy during pumping of cylinders inside the engines. BMW includes this technology in all of its new models, and Nissan offers it in its Infiniti G37 model.

"When we were writing the regulations, we didn't rely on just full hybrids to get to our goal," said Steve Abu, assistant chief of the air board's Mobile Source Control Division. "We simply relied on technology that's either already available off the shelf, or reasonably available by 2016."

But Newton argued it's not that simple.

"Automakers want to use proven, reliable technologies. ... You can't just throw all of that in together," he said.

The industry also believes the cost of manufacturing would increase by \$3,000 per vehicle or more, Newton said. But the air board estimates the increase at about \$1,100 per vehicle, which could be recouped from fuel savings in about three years if prices at the pump remain around \$3 a gallon, Abu said.

In fact, car shoppers in 2016 probably won't see much of a difference from what they would find at dealers today, he said.

"All you will probably notice is that the fuel economy on the window sticker has gone up," Abu said. "While the technology under the hood may be different, it will give (drivers) the same feel as driving cars today."

Hybrids and more exotic technologies - such as vehicles that would use biofuels or hydrogen fuel cells - would help cut emissions even further, Abu said.

Still, there are more details to be worked out if California receives the federal waiver, he said, such as how to regulate flex-fuel vehicles, cars available today that can use either regular unleaded gasoline or a cleaner and sustainable fuel mostly made up of ethanol such as E85.

In order for automakers to get credit for flex-fuel cars, they would need to prove that motorists are pumping E85 in their cars, not regular unleaded gasoline, Abu said. One way is to install a computer in the automobile to keep track of what kind of fuel is being used and beam the information to the manufacturer using existing communication systems such as GM's OnStar system, he said.

Exhaust debate

The issue: California is setting exhaust standards for automakers to achieve its goal of cutting carbon emissions 25 percent by 2020, as called for in landmark global warming legislation approved last year. But the state needs a federal waiver to put the new rules into effect. The governor is expected to sue this week to force the federal government to grant the waiver.

What automakers say: The new regulations are too stringent and would drive up the cost of manufacturing vehicles. They argue that the federal government should set nationwide standards.

What state officials say: Some low-emission technologies already exist to help automakers meet the new state standards.

State Air Board Accelerates Action to Improve Air Quality...in 13 Years

Mountain Enterprise (Kern County), Friday, Nov. 2, 2007

By a unanimous vote Thursday, Oct. 25, the California Air Resources Board advanced the state's global warming fight on two fronts, reports Jim Downing of the Sacramento Bee. The board adopted strict standards for measuring the "carbon offsets" generated by well-managed forests and began work on a plan to make big rigs more aerodynamic and fuel-efficient.

The carbon-offset idea fosters the use of California forests as "sponges: for carbon dioxide." Trade in carbon offsets provides a way for forest managers to earn money for pulling carbon out of the air. This will be part of the state's strategy for cutting overall emissions 25 percent by 2020.

Defining a standard for counting the carbon stored in a forest slowed the development of the domestic "offset" market, Downing reported.

"This stuff isn't easy, which is one of the reasons why it hasn't been done, or has been done badly," said Mary Nichols, the board's chairwoman. The rules adopted are designed to meet international standards, creating offsets that will hold their market value.

Six new emissions-cutting proposals were voted upon, to become law by Jan. 1, 2010. All are still subject to revision. They are scheduled to be the first regulations adopted under Assembly Bill 32, the state's much-vaunted global warming law adopted last year.

Trucking industry lobbyists have objected to the proposed big-rig rule. It requires modifications currently outlined under a voluntary truck efficiency program conducted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The proposal requires the one million tractor-trailers that travel California roads annually to be fitted with aerodynamic skirts and tails. The dual wheels and tires on 18-wheelers would be replaced with extra-wide "super-singles," which have lower rolling resistance.

The measures are predicted by the air board to cut emissions in California by two million metric tons annually, if the rules are written to include interstate trucks that travel into California. That includes trucks from Mexico. Nationwide, the effect would be to reduce emissions by roughly 20 million metric tons.

The California Trucking Association said the requirements would impose "unacceptable costs" on some trucking businesses and would raise "compatibility problems," according to Matthew Schrap, environmental affairs manager for the trucking group. Trailers fitted with the aerodynamic skirts, for instance, "can't fit into sunken loading docks," he said.

Even greater emissions cutting proposals are expected to emerge by next June, when the board is expected to produce a strategy for shaving 100 million metric tons off carbon emissions annually by 2020. That's the equivalent of taking 22 million average cars off the road, according to Downing.

-Reported by Patric Hedlund

Board to consider ban of polluting trucks at LA, Long Beach ports

In the S.F. Chronicle, L.A. Times and other papers, Sunday, Nov. 4, 2007

Long Beach, Calif. (AP) -- The Port of Long Beach's Board of Harbor Commissioners was scheduled to vote Monday on a proposal to sharply reduce pollution at the nation's busiest port complex by banning an aging fleet of diesel trucks.

The proposal calls for replacing about 16,000 trucks serving the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles by 2012. The trucks, which regulators said are a leading cause of unhealthy air around the ports, could also be retrofitted to meet more stringent emissions standards.

If approved, it would move a step closer to becoming the first action taken by Long Beach and Los Angeles under a \$2 billion plan that aims to cut pollution from ships, trains, terminal equipment and harbor craft by 45 percent.

"We feel confident it will be passed," Matt Szabo, a spokesman for Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, said Sunday.

Under the proposal, trucks that were made before 1989 and considered the worst polluters would have to be replaced by next October.

Drive Time Raises Health Risk

By Marc Kaufman

Washington Post, Monday, Nov. 5, 2007

You eat carefully, do not smoke, exercise regularly and think you are taking good care of yourself. But if you drive to work in a heavily congested area such as Los Angeles or Washington, the traffic may be undermining your efforts. A new study has found that while Los Angeles residents spend about 6 percent (1.5 hours) of their day on the road, drive time accounts for between 33 and 45 percent of their exposure to harmful air pollutants.

The two most common pollutants are diesel exhaust from trucks and ultrafine particles produced when car engines begin to accelerate. Both have significant detrimental health effects.

"If you have otherwise healthy habits and don't smoke, driving to work is probably the most unhealthy part of your day," said Scott Fruin of the University of Southern California.

Ultrafine particles are of particular concern, he said, because they can penetrate cell walls and spread throughout the body. Chemical particles in the air have been linked to cardiovascular disease, and the ultrafine appear to be the most toxic.

Researchers measured the roadway air pollution for three months in 2003 by outfitting an electric vehicle with instruments that collected data on the air contents, and videotaped the surrounding traffic and driving conditions on freeways and roads.

The study was done by researchers at USC and the California Air Resources Board and published this month in the journal *Atmospheric Environment*. The Washington area has some of the worst traffic and longest drive times in the nation.

World's Coal Dependency Hits Environment

By Michael Casey, AP Environmental Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle, N.Y. Times and other papers, Sunday, Nov. 4, 2007

TAIYUAN, China (AP) -- It takes five to 10 days for the pollution from China's coal-fired plants to make its way to the United States, like a slow-moving storm.

It shows up as mercury in the bass and trout caught in Oregon's Willamette River. It increases cloud cover and raises ozone levels. And along the way, it contributes to acid rain in Japan and South Korea and health problems everywhere from Taiyuan to the United States.

This is the dark side of the world's growing use of coal.

Cheap and abundant, coal has become the fuel of choice in much of the world, powering economic booms in China and India that have lifted millions of people out of poverty. Worldwide demand is projected to rise by about 60 percent through 2030 to 6.9 billion tons a year, most of it going to electrical power plants.

But the growth of coal-burning is also contributing to global warming, and is linked to environmental and health issues including acid rain and asthma. Air pollution kills more than 2 million people prematurely, according to the World Health Organization.

"Hands down, coal is by far the dirtiest pollutant," said Dan Jaffe, an atmospheric scientist at the University of Washington who has detected pollutants from Asia at monitoring sites on Mount Bachelor in Oregon and Cheeka Peak in Washington state. "It is a pretty bad fuel on all scores."

To understand the conflict over coal, look at Taiyuan and the surrounding Shanxi Province, the country's top coal-producing region — and one of its most polluted.

Almost overnight, coal has turned poor farmers in this city of 3 million people into Mercedes-driving millionaires, known derisively as "baofahu" or the quick rich. Flashy hotels display chunks of coal in the lobby, and sprawling malls advertise designer goods from Versace and Karl Lagerfeld. Real estate prices have doubled, residents say, and construction cranes fill the skyline.

A museum in Taiyuan celebrates all things coal. Amid photos of smiling miners, coal is presented as the foundation of the country's economic development, credited with making possible everything from the railroad to skin care products.

"Today, coal has penetrated into every aspect of people's lives," the museum says in one of many cheery pronouncements. "We can't live comfortably without coal."

Yet the cornstalks lining a highway outside the city 254 miles southwest of Beijing are covered in soot. The same soot settles on vegetables sold at the roadside, and the thick, acrid smoke blots out the morning sun. At its worst, the haze forces highway closures and flight delays.

With pressure to clean up major cities such as Shanghai and Beijing, particularly in the run-up to next year's Beijing Olympics, the central government is turning increasingly to provinces such as Shanxi to meet the country's power demands.

"They look at polluted places like Taiyuan and say it's so polluted there so it doesn't matter if they have another five power plants," said Ramanan Laxminarayan, a senior fellow at Resources For the Future, an American think tank that found links between air pollution and rising hospital admissions in Taiyuan.

"I visited these power plants and there is no concept of pollution control," he said. "They sort of had a laugh and asked, 'Why would you expect us to install pollution control equipment?'" China is home to 20 of the world's 30 most polluted cities, according to a World Bank report.

Health costs related to air pollution total \$68 billion a year, nearly 4 percent of the country's economic output, the report said. And acid rain has contaminated a third of the country, Sheng Huaren, a senior Chinese parliamentary official, said last year. It is said to destroy some \$4 billion worth of crops every year.

"What we are facing in China is enormous economic growth, and ... China is paying a price for it," said Henk Bakedam, the country representative for the World Health Organization. "Their growth is not sustainable from an environmental perspective. The good news is that they realize it. The bad news is they're dependent on coal as an energy source."

But the costs go far beyond China. The soot from power plants boosts global warming because coal emits almost twice as much carbon dioxide as natural gas. And researchers from Texas A&M University found that air pollution from China and India has increased in cloud cover and major Pacific Ocean storms by 20 percent to 50 percent over the past 20 years.

"We know dust from factories in China, India, Mexico and Africa does not simply disappear; the wind brings it here," said the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Bill Kovacs.

Kovacs said overseas dust is adding to the number of counties that do not qualify for federal transportation funds because they are out of compliance with ozone standards. More than 100 counties do not meet the limit of 84 parts per billion. China alone contributes 3 to 5 parts per billion, estimates Daniel J. Jacob, professor of atmospheric chemistry and environmental engineering at Harvard University.

Mercury, a byproduct of some coal-mining, is another major concern. The potent toxin falls into waterways and shows up in fish. Asia's contribution to U.S. mercury levels has shot up over the past 20 years. Jacob estimated half of the mercury in the United States comes from overseas, especially China.

"It's a global problem and right now China is a source on the rise," he said. "If we want to bring down mercury levels in fish, then we have to go after emissions in East Asia."

A fifth of the mercury in the Willamette River came from China and other foreign sources, said Bruce K. Hope of the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. Pregnant or nursing women who eat the fish put their babies at risk of neurological damage.

"It's frustrating to realize that part of your problem is someone else's behavior and you can't really go to them and say, 'Can you do something different?'" Hope said.

China has closed some polluting factories and says it will retire 50 gigawatts of inefficient power plants, or 8 percent of the total power grid, by 2010, according to the Pew Center for Global Climate Change. The government has also mandated that solar, wind, hydroelectric and other forms of renewable energy provide 10 percent of the nation's power by 2010, and ordered key industries to reduce energy consumption by 20 percent.

President Hu Jintao, in a speech to a key party congress last month, promised a cleanup. But China has fallen short of its national targets for using energy more efficiently, and coal remains a major energy source.

"Everyone knows coal is dirty, but there is no way that China can get rid of coal," the World Bank's Zhao Jianping said in Beijing. "It must rely on it for years to come, until humans can find a new magic solution."

Robert N. Schock, the director of studies for the World Energy Council, agreed that coal, cheap and abundant, will remain a crucial source of energy for many years and be crucial to improving living standards in developing countries.

"Twenty-five percent of the world's electric power is now generated by coal, and those plants are not likely to disappear overnight," Schock said.

In Shanxi province, authorities have pledged to close 900 coal mines and dozens of makeshift factories that process coal for the steel industry, according to the official Xinhua News Agency. The Asian Development Bank is providing more than \$200 million in loans to improve air quality in the province, through programs to shift to cleaner-burning natural gas for household heating and a demonstration project to capture methane, a greenhouse gas released in coal mining.

Taiyuan, dubbed the world's most polluted city in the 1990s, is no longer thought to be the worst, thanks to various efforts including phasing out coal-burning boilers. But the level of pollutants in the air remains five to 10 times higher than levels in New York or London. Residents say they see blue skies fewer than 120 days a year.

Australians Paul and Helen Douglas, who work for Evergreen in Taiyuan, an American social service agency, said their 21-month-old daughter Rose has been found in tests to have elevated lead levels. She has developed a chronic cough, Paul Douglas said, and the family will likely return to Australia before their contract ends if their daughter's toxin levels rise further.

"People say we are irresponsible and that we are making decisions that are injuring our children," he said of coming under fire from relatives and church members for staying in Taiyuan.

Taiyuan residents, though, shrug wearily when the talk turns to pollution, fearful that speaking out could get them in trouble. But when pressed, the complaints tumble forth and expose a community held hostage by the soot.

Residents seal their windows to keep out the dirty air. Parents are warned not to let their toddlers play outside, for fear of being covered in coal dust. Fruits and vegetables must be washed in detergent.

"I'm worried about my children," said a woman who lives in the shadow of a power plant and fertilizer factory. She would only give her surname, Zhang. "We worry about everything. If you get sick seriously, you will die."

Many complain of chronic sore throats, bronchitis, lung cancer and pulmonary fibrosis. One study, by researchers at Norway's Center for International Climate and Environmental Research, found Taiyuan's pollution increased death rates by 15 percent and chronic respiratory ailments by 40 to 50 percent.

"I feel terrible and I'm coughing all the time," said William Li, a retired engineer from Taiyuan. His father died of lung cancer and his son has tracheitis, an upper respiratory condition. "The coal, it produces electric power that we send to other provinces. But we are left with the pollution."

[Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register commentary, Saturday, Nov. 3, 2007:](#)

Four perspectives on growth, plus yours Panel will discuss responsible growth in Tulare County

Tulare County Citizens for Responsible Growth and College of the Sequoias will sponsor a public forum on growth on Wednesday.

Issues such as the direction of development, effects on our economy and farmlands, water supply, [air quality](#), transportation and public safety will be discussed.

The forum has invited four panelists representing a diverse range of backgrounds and expertise.

Each of the four panelists - Mike Knopf, Greg Kirkpatrick, Laurel Firestone and Jeff Steen - has provided a statement of their guiding principles. They are presented below for readers to become familiar with their positions. Readers are also invited to submit questions.

Moderator for the forum will be Brian Newton of Tulare County Citizens for Responsible Growth. The panelists will be invited to make an opening statement. They will be invited to answer prepared questions from Newton, then spoken and written questions from the audience.

The panelists will conclude with closing statements from each. The public is invited and admission is free.

Growth Panelist: Jeff Steen

? Age: 39

? Residence: Springville

? Occupation: Citrus farmer and packer

Today's sprawling urban and suburban development patterns are seriously impairing our quality of life. They produce worsening traffic congestion, longer commutes, sickening [air pollution](#) and a physically less-fit human population. These patterns require enormous taxpayer expenditures for expansion and maintenance of infrastructure and public services. Concurrently, these patterns cause the unnecessary loss of irreplaceable farmland and open space, waste dwindling natural resources, and lessen our sense of community.

These growth patterns simply make a community bigger: more people, more buildings, more infrastructure. Responsible growth, on the other hand, is the activity that makes communities better.

It enhances local economies and communities, and protects and even improves natural resources. At countywide public workshops, Tulare County residents from all walks of life clearly told county officials,

"We want a general plan that centers future growth on our existing communities. We want [cleaner air](#), safe drinking water and protection of our priceless agricultural and scenic natural lands. We want our economy to grow, but we want to grow responsibly."

The tenets of responsible growth include compact, resource-efficient, mixed-use development; infill in existing communities; housing for all income levels; ready access to transportation; and ensuring that development completely pays its way. The land use principles of responsible growth are simply the starting point. We also need government, business, education and our communities to work together to build prosperous and livable places.

We need to align these common-sense principles with a vision that prosperity in 21st century will be based on creating and maintaining a sustainable standard of living and a high quality of life for all. To create a vibrant local economy, we need to implement a long-term investment strategy that encourages local enterprise; serves the needs of local residents, workers and businesses; promotes stable employment and revenues by building on local competitive advantages; protects our natural environment; and is capable of succeeding in the global marketplace. Visioning, planning and implementation efforts should continually involve all sectors.

Responsible growth can happen in Tulare County if we adopt and follow these smart growth policies, investing in our existing cities, communities, and hamlets to sustain them as diverse, thriving places to live and conserving and protecting the working landscapes and natural resources on which we all depend.

[Letter to the San Diego Union-Tribune, Monday, Nov. 5, 2007:](#)

After the Cedar Fire in 2003, many experts repeated their advocacy of controlled burning of overgrown brush during periods of low wind and damp weather conditions to deprive wildfires of the fuel they need to progress. Controlled burning in a strategic pattern, they say, would, at best stop the downwind track of the fire and at least give them a chance to contain it.

If one thing is certain, it is that brush lands always burn - either when we choose or when Nature chooses. Nature is a cruel, cruel woman who cares nothing for homeowners and always chooses to burn brush during Santa Ana winds.

The environmental activist community violently objected to any controlled burn program, saying it would displace wildlife and pollute the air. They preferred to blame the destructive fire conditions on city planners and greedy developers who build too close to brush lands. They won. How many homeowners have now lost? The wildlife that the activists saved from displacement probably would have moved over a ridge or two and survived a controlled burn. Not many survived the '07 fires. Air pollution? Take a breath.

It was reported that the Harris Fire in part followed the path of the Laguna Fire of 1970. So, apparently, 37 years is sufficient time for brush growth to reach dangerous levels.

Can we not just ignore the no-growth activists and adopt a reasonable program of controlled, pattern burning? It could prevent a repeat of a disaster of this magnitude 40 years hence, and it would be an easy task. The 2003 fires and the 2007 fires have given us a big head start.

I am sure that many in the county look east from their back porches and see, with great trepidation, large expanses of overgrown brush.

Richard A Gant, San Diego